

**Afghanistan:  
An Introduction to  
the Country and People**

# Introduction

---

<b>Purpose</b>	With United States involvement in Afghanistan, knowledge of the country is imperative. This “handbook” explains a number of basic issues that should be in the knowledge “toolbox” of a Marine working with Afghans or deployed to the country.
<b>Three Forces</b>	Three main forces have shaped present day Afghanistan: Tribalism , Islam, and geography. They have permanent and far-reaching effects on Afghani society and on anyone involved with that society.
<b>Geography</b>	Even though it is a landlocked country, Afghanistan has been on the crossroads of history. The country and people have been at the mercy of numerous empires and conquering states. Afghanistan was a prize worth possessing for its river basins and fertile valley and for its location of the east-west trade routes, especially the Silk Route to China. This geographic factor has affected and changed the peoples of Afghanistan.
<b>Ethnic Interaction</b>	<p>The interaction of the various ethnic groups that invaded the region contributed to the patchwork of people that make up present-day Afghanistan. Each of these external groups that invaded affected the inhabitants of what is now Afghanistan in unique ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For example, Genghis Khan destroyed most of the towns in the thirteenth century, forcing much of population into nomadism.</li><li>• A later Turkic dynasty, The Timurids, reconstituted the empire, but was forced out by pressure from newer groups on the west, east, and north of the country.</li></ul> <p>This constant shift and pressure of various external and internal groups has molded the Afghani attitude toward outsiders and indigenous groups of the country.</p>

---

*Continued on next page*

## Introduction, Continued

---

**Tribalism**

Tribalism is another key factor that has affected the social organization of Aghani society. It affects kinship, loyalties, honor, and even revenge. The family as a unit can reach upwards of 50 people all united by the bond of a common male “father.” This tribalism, with emphasis on the male or father’s family, means that sons often bring their brides to live in their father’s home.

Afghanistan remains a patrilineal society, in which membership in both family and lineage, as well as property, is inherited only by kin on the father’s side of the family. Kin on the father’s side of the family form close alliances.

---

**International  
“Tribalism”**

This tribalism is not just a local issue. Tribalism is what holds much of the Osam bin Laden’s Al Qaida terrorist network together. The bonding and the rules of social relations established in the village and nomadic setting play the same part in the international network. This tribal set of values that applies in the farming and nomadic settlements of Afghanistan and Pakistan has the same validity in Bosnia, Macedonia, and the United States.

---

**Islam**

Islam is the last influence that affects Afghanistan in a permanent way. It is a basis for the daily living and for understanding how Afghans approach interpersonal relationships. It is a guide to the moral and ethical values that Afghans hold as well as their spiritual mindset.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Introduction, Continued

### Table of Contents

The table below lists the main topics and their page numbers.

Topic	See Page
Introduction	2
Quick Facts on Afghanistan	5
Geography and Climate	7
Economy and Livelihood	9
Languages and Ethnicity: Diversity	11
Languages of Afghanistan	12
Ethnic Groups: Pashtun	13
Ethnic Groups: Tajik (Tadjik)	15
Ethnic Groups: Hazara (Hezora)	16
Ethnic Groups: Uzbek	18
Recent Afghan History	19
Taliban's Rise to Power	21
Taliban: Who are they?	22
Taliban Relations with Neighboring Countries	23
Islam: Basic Ideas	24
Arabs and Islam	25
Muhammad (Mohammed)	26
Five Pillars of Islam	28
Al Qur'an (Koran) and Sunnah	30
Jihad (Djihad)	31
Islamic Schools (Sects)	32
Osama (Usama) bin Laden	34
Appendix A: Omar, Leader of the Taliban	36
Appendix B: History of Terrorist Activity	41
Appendix C: International Associations	42
Appendix D: Other References	44

## Quick Facts on Afghanistan

<b>Introduction</b>	This brief resource guide covers a number of important subjects that give anyone involved in Afghanistan a clearer understanding of the country. This page of quick facts is like a job aid. It highlights critical issues.
<b>Land of Contrasts</b>	Afghanistan consists of a major mountain range, the Hindu Kush, with its valleys, deserts and river system. <a href="http://fermi.jhuapl.edu/maps/afghanistan/">http://fermi.jhuapl.edu/maps/afghanistan/</a> This territory includes many varied geographical and ecological zones. The different peoples of Afghanistan are as distinct and varied as the geography. Bringing them under one flag has made them into a “single” society.
<b>Name</b>	The Islamic State of Afghanistan (renamed by the Taliban as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1997) is a land-locked country in southwest Asia.
<b>Size and Population</b>	Area: 652,225 square kilometers or 251, 772 square miles. Estimated population: @ 27,000,000.
<b>Pop. Age; Life Expectancy</b>	0-14 years: 42.2%; 15-64 years: 55.01%; 65 years and over: 2.79%. Life expectancy about 46 years.
<b>Languages and Ethnicity</b>	Pushtu 35%, Afghan Persian (Dari) 50%, Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11%, 30 minor languages 4%.
<b>Religion</b>	Sunni Muslim 84%, Shi'a Muslim 15%, other 1%.
<b>Administrative Sectors</b>	County is divided into 30 provinces or velayets. The largest in area are Herat, Helmand, Qandahar (Kandahar), and Farah. The largest in terms of population are Kabul, Herat, Balkh, and Ghazni.
<b>Population Centers</b>	Principal towns include Kabul, Qandahar, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, and Ghazni. <a href="http://www.afghana.com/GetLocal/Afghanistan/Provinces.htm">http://www.afghana.com/GetLocal/Afghanistan/Provinces.htm</a>

*Continued on next page*

## Quick Facts on Afghanistan, Continued

---

<b>Government/ Legal System</b>	A one-party Islamic religious state; legal system called the Sharia, based on the Qur'an (Koran), the holy book of Islam.
<b>Politics</b>	Taliban (religious students) headed by Mullah Mohammad Omar; United National Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan or UNIFSA, often referred to as the Northern Alliance, 13 "parties" opposed to the Taliban.
<b>Economic Sectors</b>	Agriculture: 53% of gross national product (GNP); industry: 28.5% of GNP; services: 18.5% of GNP(1990).
<b>Additional Sites</b>	<a href="http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html">http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html</a> -- CIA site that has handbooks of countries of the world. <a href="http://ebooks.whsmithonline.co.uk/htmldata/ency.asp?mainpage=HTTP://EBOOKS.WHSMITHONLINE.CO.UK/ENCYCLOPEDIA/01/C0000001.HTM">http://ebooks.whsmithonline.co.uk/htmldata/ency.asp?mainpage=HTTP://EBOOKS.WHSMITHONLINE.CO.UK/ENCYCLOPEDIA/01/C0000001.HTM</a> -- short summary about Afghanistan from <i>The Hutchinson Family Encyclopedia</i> . <a href="http://www.nutshellnotes.com/afghanistan_text.htm">http://www.nutshellnotes.com/afghanistan_text.htm</a> -- short dictionary-like definition information about the country.

---

## Geography and Climate

---

### **Land-locked**

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in southwest Asia. To the north, its neighbors are Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Iran is to the west; the People's Republic of China to the northeast, and Pakistan to the east and south. [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia01/afghanistan\\_sm01.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia01/afghanistan_sm01.jpg)

---

### **Chief Topographic Feature**

The Hindu Kush mountains are the main topographic feature that marks Afghanistan. These mountains are a barrier between the northern provinces and the rest of Afghanistan. They divide the country into three distinct geographic areas: the central highlands, the northern plains, and the southwestern plateau. [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/afghanistan\\_topo86.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_topo86.jpg)

---

### **Central Highlands**

The central highlands is an area of about 160,000 square miles. This part of Afghanistan has deep, narrow valleys, as well as high mountains, which have proven to be historically important to the defense of the country. The Khyber Pass, one of the most famous routes to the Indian subcontinent, is located in the mountain ranges of the central highlands. <http://www.maps.com/cgi-bin/search/hyperseek.cgi?search=CAT&Category=Asia%3AAfghanistanP&Qualifier=>

The climate of the central highland is usually dry, with temperatures in the summer averaging around 80 degrees Fahrenheit; the winters are very cold.

---

### **Southern Plateau**

This region of Afghanistan consists of high plateaus and sandy deserts. This desolate region covers about 50,000 square miles and is crossed by several large rivers. The average altitude of the southern plateau is about 3,000 feet. Qandahar (Kandahar), at an elevation of about 3,500 feet, enjoys a dry, yet mild climate.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Geography and Climate, Continued

---

<b>Northern Plains</b>	<p>The northern plains are about 40,000 square miles of extremely fertile foothills and plains.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Amu River (formerly called the Oxus River) runs through the foothills of this region.</li><li>• The average elevation is about 2,000 feet.</li></ul> <p>Agriculture is the main occupation in this region. There are large amounts of mineral deposits and natural gas in the northern plains.</p>
<b>Climate</b>	<p>The climate of Afghanistan varies dramatically between the mountain country and the lowlands. In the southwest, during summer, the temperature can reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit. In the winter, in the Hindu Kush mountains, it can fall as low as –15 degrees Fahrenheit.</p>
<b>Map Site</b>	<p><a href="http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/afghanistan.html">http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/afghanistan.html</a> -- This site has many different kinds of maps of Afghanistan.</p>

---



# Economy and Livelihood

---

## Economic Areas

The chief areas of the economy discussed are based on the size of the population engaged in each economic area.

- Most people in Afghanistan are farmer or peasants who cultivate crops for personal use or for marketing and selling as produce. Herding is the next favored occupation by population size, followed by forestry and fishing.
- Manufacturing is the second largest area, followed by wholesale and retail commerce, then by transportation and mining. (With the current chaotic situation in the country, much of the economy has been disrupted.)

---

## Agricultural Economy

Agriculture requires five major means of production: land, water, seed, labor, and animals (or tractors). Water is the most important resource in this respect. Each village has an official chosen by the elders or the village council. He regulates the division of water among landowners.

---

## Family Farming

The “family farm” is the most common form of ownership and land cultivation. The family usually provides the labor and animals to cultivate its own land. Other agricultural labor arrangements include:

- Sharecropping, where the tenant receives a part of the produce.
- Commercial farming, where the owner pays cash to the farmers.

Because of the current chaotic conditions in Afghanistan, these agricultural “systems” are in decline.

---

## Herding

Pastoral nomadism has been the traditional way that Aghanis have raised and herded their cattle, sheep, and goats. These nomads usually maintain their herds in groups, traditionally as clans or tribes. They might rely on the peasants or farmers for staples such as grain and implements they need for running a household.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Economy and Livelihood, Continued

---

### **Mobility: An Advantage**

Because of their mobility nomads were:

- The bearers of information and news.
- A traditional source of credit because their herds were a “countable” tangible source of cash. In the towns and villages where they took their stock to sell, nomads could buy goods on credit to sell to the isolated farmers or peasants living near their summer pastures.
- Often smugglers, both inside the country and across the borders.

Again, based on the chaotic war conditions of the country the usual nomadic herding patterns may have diminished or disappeared.

---

### **Manufacturing and Commerce**

Besides food staples, such as margarine and wheat flour, woven fabrics, clothes and shoes are produced.

- Fertilizer, cement, and electric energy are the three main industrial “products.”
- Mining includes hard coal, gypsum, and natural gas.

The war in Afghanistan has caused industrial and commercial output to decline.

---

# Languages and Ethnicity: Diversity

---

## Introduction

As a landlocked nation, Afghanistan is at the crossroads for much migration and many settlements. The result of this exposure is a country with diverse ethnic and linguistics (language) groups.

---

## Two Perspectives

This section gives you an idea of the kinds of people living in Afghanistan, including the ethnic groups of the country. An ethnic group consists of people who have many cultural traits in common. These may include language, religion, morals, customs and ceremonies, economics and livelihood.

Another way to look at diversity in a country is according to the languages the peoples of the country speak. Languages may cross ethnic boundaries, for example in Afghanistan, Dari is a common language to many of the different ethnic groups in the country. It crosses the ethnic/cultural boundaries of these different groups.

---

## Languages of Afghanistan

---

<b>Pushtu (Pashtu)</b>	Pushtu is the official language of Afghanistan as, for example, Turkish is the official language of Turkey. Pushtu is also spoken in northern Pakistan. The language is written in a modified Arabic script.
<b>Dari</b>	Dari or Afghan Persian or Eastern Farsi is spoken by about 43% of the population. It is often referred to as the language of business and commerce.
<b>Turkic Languages</b>	About 11% of the population speaks a Turkic language, mainly Uzbek or Turkmen. Afghanis living close to the border of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan probably speak Turkic languages.

---

# Ethnic Groups: Pashtun

---

**Introduction** Like the languages of the country, there are various ethnic groups in Afghanistan. The main groups are the Pashtuns (Pathans), Uzbeks, Hazaras (Hezoras), Tajiks (Tadjiks), and other minor groups.  
[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/afghanistan\\_ethnoling\\_97.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_ethnoling_97.jpg)

---

**Definition** The Pashtuns live in southern and eastern Afghanistan in a population “belt” stretching from Kabul in the east to Quandahar (Kandahar) to Zaranj, which is on the border with Iran. They also live in western Pakistan.

- Pashtuns speak Pushtu (Pashtu) and are Sunni Muslims (see the section on **Islam** for an explanation of Sunnis). Many Pashtuns also speak Dari, the second language of Afghanistan
- Pashtuns make up about 38% of the population of Afghanistan. Until the recent Taliban take-over, the Pashtuns controlled the ruling dynasty of the country for about 200 years.

---

**Settlements** Pashtuns generally live in tribal villages. A number of villages may be near a town. A village is built primarily with regard to the location of water and to self-defense. The dominant lineages or extended families usually have the best and most strategic lands. Familial ties determine a group’s location relative to the dominant tribe.

---

**Nomads** Some Pashtuns are herders. They move from site to site following the pastures as the seasons change. Like the permanent villages mentioned above, the campsites of these nomadic Pashtuns are based on tribal lineages. Their tents are made from goat hair, supported by posts or arched poles.

---

**Economy and Livelihood** Pashtuns work at grain farming and animal husbandry (see **Nomads** above). Wheat is the most important crop. Other important products are fruits, nuts, vegetables, and opium.

Industry usually includes trades such as shoemaking and carpentry. Some Pashtuns are small businessmen and traders.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Ethnic Groups: Pashtun, Continued

---

<b>Kinship</b>	<p>The tribe is the unit of kinship. Descent is claimed from the father's side of the family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The clan is the principal division of a larger tribe. A clan is usually the offspring of one man, often including four or five generations, what is sometimes referred to as an extended family in Western terms. In this clan, a person marries and forms bonds.</li><li>• The smallest kinship unit is a household. The household or <i>kor</i> is the main economic and social unit; its members may form a village, single housing compound, or a nomadic group.</li></ul>
<b>Local Authority</b>	<p>Pashtuns have a concept and practice of local authority based on tribalism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Honor (<i>nang</i>) is a tradition that pervades Pashtun society. It means there is little social class and no central authority.</li><li>• Taxes or rent (<i>qualang</i>) gives status and social class to the local people, many of whom are landowners. Qualang also means that there may be a "centralized" authority at the local level.</li></ul>
<b>National Government</b>	<p>Generally, villages consider that the national government has responsibility for conscripting young men into the military and for taxation, both of which take resources away from the clan/tribe. Thus, villagers may have an attitude of neutrality toward, non-cooperation with, or defensiveness against the central government.</p>
<b>Important Customs</b>	<p>Pashtuns generally believe in and follow these customs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purdah: Strict separation of the sexes in public</li><li>• Chadori: women wearing the veil.</li><li>• Pakhtunwal: A mixture of blood-line revenge, hospitality to guests, defense of those who are in one's care, chastity of married women and caring for the weak.</li></ul>

---

## Ethnic Groups: Tajik (Tadjik)

---

<b>Definition</b>	<p>Tajiks (pronounced TAH-jeeks) make up about 25% of the population of Afghanistan. They live</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In a large area north and west of Kabul. (This area borders on the Republic of Tajikistan.)</li><li>• Clustered around the city of Herat in western Afghanistan.</li></ul> <p>Tajiks are also the principal inhabitants of the Republic of Tajikistan, a former region of the Soviet Union.</p> <p><a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/war_on_terror/key_maps/ethnic_groups.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/war_on_terror/key_maps/ethnic_groups.stm</a></p>
<b>Language and Culture</b>	<p>Tajiks are primarily Sunni Muslims. They speak the Tajik and Dari languages. Tajiks are believed to be descendants of the ancient Persians.</p>
<b>Economy and Livelihood</b>	<p>Since Tajiks in urban areas are well educated and wealthy, they make up the elite of Afghanistan. Their influence is in commerce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The plains-dwelling Tajiks live mainly in Herat, in Parwan, and also around Kabul. They are town dwelling and are traders, skilled artisans, and farmers, all middle-class. Because they have settled in towns, they have replaced their tribalism with a town orientation and a strong sense of community loyalty.</li><li>• Tajiks in rural areas make their living by farming and herding. They are a sedentary people. Landowners are usually village leaders.</li></ul>
<b>Politics: Importance in Northern Alliance</b>	<p>Tajiks are the second largest group after the Pashtuns. They are also the Pashtuns' closest rivals for power and prestige, but with two exceptions, one in the 14th century and one for nine months in 1929, the Tajiks have never ruled their region.</p> <p>Tajiks form an important part of the Northern Alliance, which opposes the Taliban. From a group of Tajik farmers, the chief leader of the Northern Alliance, Ahmad Shah Masoud, emerged. First he fought a guerilla war against the Soviet Communists and later against the Taliban. Taliban supporters assassinated him in late summer 2001.</p>

---

## Ethnic Groups: Hazara (Hezora)

---

<b>Definition</b>	<p>Hazaras make up about 19% of the Afghani population. They are Shi'ite Muslims, not Sunnis (for more details on Shi'ites, see the section entitled <b>Islam</b>).</p> <p><a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/war_on_terror/key_maps/ethnic_groups.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/war_on_terror/key_maps/ethnic_groups.stm</a></p>
<b>Groups/Settlements</b>	<p>The Hazaras fall into three groups: Settlements are located in an areas bounded</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On the north by the town of Bamian (Bamyan)</li><li>• On the west by Chaghcharan</li><li>• In the east by Kabul</li><li>• On the southeast by the town of Ghazni</li></ul> <p>The Hazaras themselves call this area Hazaristan, country of the Hazaras. Many Hazaras were forced off their land by the expansion of the majority Pashtuns and now live in Kabul and other towns.</p>
<b>Language</b>	<p>The Hazaras speak a language called Hazaragi. It is a mixture of Farsi (the language of Iran), Mongol, and Turkish.</p>
<b>Religion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Because they are Shi'ites, the Hazaras have been subjected to oppression over the years. Most recently, the Taliban massacred about 300 Hazara men in January 2001. The reason was the Hazaras were suspected of collaborating with the United Front (Northern Alliance).</li><li>• Since they are Shi'ites, the Hazaras get support from Iran, which is predominantly a Shi'ite Muslim country. <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_1500000/1500682.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_1500000/1500682.stm</a> -- discusses recent persecution of Hazaras.</li></ul>

---

*Continued on next page*



## Ethnic Groups: Hazara (Hezora), Continued

---

<b>Origins</b>	<p>The origin of the Hazaras is interesting. Some researchers believe that Hazaras are the descendents of the 12th century Mongol warrior, Genghis Khan and his followers; others trace the Hazaras to the Buddhist civilization of 2000 years ago, the Bamiyan, whose center was in Afghanistan. <a href="http://www.hazara.net/hazara/geography/Buddha/buddha.html">http://www.hazara.net/hazara/geography/Buddha/buddha.html</a> -- an article about relationship of Hazaras to the Buddhist statues.</p>
<b>Economy and Livelihood</b>	<p>The primary occupations of the Hazaras are farming and trade. The main crops are wheat, barley, and tobacco. In some of the warmer areas, rice is cultivated.</p> <p>Hazaras raise sheep, horses, and camels. Their horses are especially bred for hard work in the mountains. The wool from Hazara sheep is considered the best in Afghanistan. Camels are raised for their hides.</p>
<b>Social Organization</b>	<p>Like the Pashtuns, the Hazaras are organized by “tribes” or large clans. There are about 15 of these super-clans. The members belonging to a specific clan usually live in a certain geographic region. With so many clans, historically, there has been much inter- clan rivalry</p>
<b>Tribe/Clan: Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Daizinjat</b> clan lives in the area of Badsken, which borders on Herat and Koshak in the east. In Khila there are about 1,000 families. The Daizinjat tribe has about 30 clans. The most powerful is the Kaka clan.</li><li>• <b>Daikundi</b> consists of five tribes: Dolat Beg, Roshan Beg, Heider Beg, Gawash, and Barat. The greenest land of the Hazaras is in Daikundi, which is also called Hazarastan Kashmir. Before the Hazaras, the Tajiks lived in Daikundi.</li></ul>
<b>Local and Central Governmental Authority</b>	<p>Because of their position as a religious and ethnic minority in Afghanistan, there has been constant tension between the local Hazara tribes/clans and the central authority of the country. The tension has boiled over a number of times into open revolution against the central authority, most notably in the early 1890’s.</p>

---

## Ethnic Groups: Uzbek

<b>Definition</b>	<p>The Uzbeks are a Turkic-speaking ethnic group, which makes up about 6% to 8% of the population of Afghanistan. Most of them are Sunni Muslims. They are also the dominant population in the neighboring country of Uzbekistan.</p> <p><a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/war_on_terror/key_maps/ethnic_groups.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/war_on_terror/key_maps/ethnic_groups.stm</a></p>
<b>Location</b>	<p>Uzbeks live in a population “belt” that stretches along the northern border of Afghanistan from Maymaneh through Mazar-e-Sharif and Konduz. This Uzbek population belt parallels Afghanistan’s northern border with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.</p>
<b>Social Structure</b>	<p>There are two types of Uzbeks: farmers and nomads. The farmers and city dwellers are mainly businessmen and tradesmen. The nomads raise sheep, goats, and cattle.</p>
<b>Settlements</b>	<p>The basic living unit is the village. Again, there is a nomadic village and a more permanent farming/commercial village. Both villages are based on kinship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The nomadic village is mobile, moving to pasturage as the seasons change.</li><li>• The farming village is a concentrated, permanent settlement: Houses are built close together. Most houses are walled and form a compound with a central courtyard.</li></ul>
<b>Importance of Uzbeks in Afghanistan</b>	<p>Although a smaller minority in Afghanistan, the Uzbeks have played an important role in the country. One of the most important and most controversial groups who oppose the Taliban is the forces under the control of the Uzbek leader Abdur Rashid Dostum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dostum allied himself with the government in Kabul but later turned against it and joined with the <i>mujahidin</i> in 1992.</li><li>• He is currently allied with other factions of the Northern Alliance.</li></ul> <p><a href="http://www.afghan-info.com/Politics/Afghan_Mujaheedins/Warlords.htm">http://www.afghan-info.com/Politics/Afghan_Mujaheedins/Warlords.htm</a></p>

# Recent Afghan History

---

## Introduction

This section emphasizes recent history of Afghanistan to show the events that led up to the Taliban taking power in the country.

<http://nths.newtrier.k12.il.us/academics/social/conflict/4s%20Web%20Pages/Period9/Afghanistan/afghanhome.htm> -- a more detailed and lengthier history of the country.

---

## Communist Take-over

- In 1978, during the Saur Revolution, the Afghan communist party under Muhammad Taraki overthrew the republican government. This communist party, called the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, started land redistribution, secularized the country and began to re-educate the people.
- Factionalism caused the party to break down. This allowed the Soviets to invade in 1979. Eighty thousand Soviet troops invaded the country. The Soviets replaced Taraki with their puppet Babrak Kamal.  
<http://www.afghan-info.com/History/Polevent.htm#saour>

At this point groups of Islamic tribes/clansmen formed a loose alliance that collectively became known as the *mujahidin*. They were anti-Soviet and anti-Communist.

---

## Soviet Domination/ Rise of *Mujahidin*

During the 10-year occupation of Afghanistan, about five million Afghans fled the country; close to 1.5 million were killed.

During this period, the *mujahidin* gained prominence as the group that fiercely opposed the Soviets. They were supported by the West and by Muslim countries in their struggle against the Soviets and the puppet government that the Soviets had imposed on the country.

The Soviets tried a policy of reconciliation with the opposition *mujahidin* in 1987, but the seven-party *mujahidin* alliance refused to observe a cease-fire and to participate in negotiations with the Soviet puppet regime.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Recent Afghan History, Continued

---

### Soviet Domination/ New Constitution

A new constitution was adopted in July of 1987, allowing the formation of other political parties beside the communists.

- The communist party of Afghanistan said it would be willing to share power with opposition groups in a coalition government.
  - The name of the country was changed back to the Republic of Afghanistan from the Peoples Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.
- 

### Soviet Withdrawal

The Soviets withdrew their troops in 1989. The last president, Najibullah, remained in power. Civil war continued as the *mujahidin* were staunchly against the government of President Najibullah.

---

### *Mujahidin* Rule: New Government

A number of attempts were made to integrate the *mujahidin* in the central government through advisory councils of tribal leaders, which eventually elected Rabbani as president of the country.

In 1992, the Peshawar Agreement was ratified: A purely Islamic interim government was installed in place of Najibullah's.

---

### New Rules for Afghani Society

- Leadership in this new government rotated among the seven Islamic *mujahidin* groups.
  - This coalition government banned alcohol and gambling, required women to wear the veil, and separated education into male and female institutions.
- 

### Factionalism

Infighting among the various factions of the *mujahidin* continued, even though each faction had two ministerial posts in the government.

- Eventually the alliance broke down into civil war. The most serious conflict was between Premier Hekmatyar, a Pashtun, and President Rabbani, a Tajik, together with his defense minister, Ahmad Shah Massoud.
  - The result of this armed conflict was the almost total destruction of Kabul and more important, Pakistan's support for a group of Pashtun religious students, the Taliban.
-

# Taliban's Rise to Power

---

<b>Early Advances</b>	<p>In September of 1994, the Taliban (meaning students in Persian), an “army” of former Muslim seminarians and religious students, entered the civil war. By 1995, the Taliban had claimed victory in the town of Herat and had advanced on Kabul, the capital.</p> <p>During 1995, the Taliban made extensive gains in the country, particularly in the south. In many instances, they were welcomed by the local Afghans who were tired with and disgusted by the chaos, corruption, and instability that <i>mujahidin</i> factionalism had caused.</p>
<b>Occupation of the Capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• By autumn of 1996, the Taliban had driven President Rabbani out of Kabul, captured the capital, and executed Najibullah. In May 1997, after a brief alliance between opposition forces and the Taliban, violent civil war again broke out.</li><li>• Fighting has continued between the United National Islamic Front (Northern Alliance), consisting of the <i>mujahidin</i> factions, and the Taliban.</li></ul>
<b>Afghanistan divided: Taliban</b>	<p>The Taliban hold about 85-90% of the area of Afghanistan.</p> <p><a href="http://europe.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/trade.center/afghan.civil.html">http://europe.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/trade.center/afghan.civil.html</a> , <a href="http://www1.cnn.com/WORLD/9610/04/afghan/index.html">http://www1.cnn.com/WORLD/9610/04/afghan/index.html</a> -- good discussion of the problems the Taliban have in uniting the country.</p>
<b>United Front/Northern Alliance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Northern Alliance holds the remaining 10% to 15% of the country. As of late November 2001, the alliance has extended its control over the country, capturing Kabul.</li><li>• The alliance is strongly against the Taliban's extreme fundamentalist methods and religious philosophy and is very much opposed to Pashtun ethnic dominance.</li></ul> <p><a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/graphics/attack/zone_3.html">http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/graphics/attack/zone_3.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/parties.html">http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/parties.html</a> – lists current anti-Taliban parties and their leaders.</p> <p><a href="http://www.afghan-web.com/ciriello/alliance/">http://www.afghan-web.com/ciriello/alliance/</a> -- pictures of alliance forces.</p>

# Taliban: Who Are They?

---

## Education and Training

The Taliban were originally young Afghanis who went to Pakistan to study in madrassas (religious schools). These schools focus on instruction in the Qur'an; however, a number of them teach military training and militant Islam to their students. These schools were the source of the Taliban's interpretation of Islam and their approach to restructuring Afghanistan socially and politically. (Saudi and Pakistani intelligence services also trained these Afghan religious students.)

With their "purist" Islamic view, the Taliban were considered a group that promised a clean, uncorrupt society for Afghanis and were opposed to the factionalism and corruption of the *mujahidin*, who had plunged Afghanistan into civil war after the withdrawal of the Soviets.

---

## Outlook

The Taliban are very provincial and backward in their outlook: The external world, much of which they consider unclean and corrupt, begins at the border of Afghanistan.

The Taliban have a close relationship to Osama bin Laden, whom they feel follows the same fundamentalist precepts they believe in. Their relationship to bin Laden has been further cemented by the marriage of their leader, Mullah Omar, to one of bin Laden's daughters. (See appendix A, a biography of Omar, the leader of the Taliban.)

---

## Taliban Oppression

Besides the requirement for women to be fully veiled and accompanied by a man in public, the Taliban have

- Stopped all education for girls and women
- Forbidden women to work
- Forbidden women to wear white socks
- Required men to grow beards
- Stopped the Afghan national sport of Buzkash
- Changed the name of the country to the Emirate of Afghanistan
- Forced conscription upon the male population of Afghanistan to increase their fundamentalist army

The law of the country is the Taliban interpretation of the Sharia, Islamic religious law, with strict penalties, such as death and stoning, for infringements of the various oppressive laws imposed on the Afghan population.

---

## Taliban Relations with Neighboring Countries

---

### **Iran**

Tensions between Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and Iran have been high. The Iranians were angered by the murder of their diplomats and a journalist by the Taliban near Mazar-i-Sharif. In response to these killings, in September 1998, Iran deployed 70,000 troops to conduct military exercises near the Afghan border, but no fighting occurred.

The Iranians also feel a “kinship” to the Shi’ite Hazaras of Afghanistan, whom the Taliban have persecuted and massacred. Finally, the extreme primitiveness and barbarity of Taliban fundamentalism have alarmed Iran. The Iranians would most probably like to see the Taliban removed from Afghanistan as the controlling government authority.

---

### **Pakistan**

The Taliban have support among some of the masses of Pakistan and the Afghani refugees living in Pakistan, particularly those living close to the Afghan-Pakistani border and those trained in the militant madrassas. The kind of fundamentalism preached by the Taliban is now prevalent in some sectors of Pakistani society.

Although the government of Pakistan supports the U.S. effort to root out bin Laden and his network of terrorists based in Afghanistan, Pakistan recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan long after the rest of the world denied their legitimacy.

---

### **Other Countries**

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are all apprehensive about the Taliban, particularly their type of Islamic fundamentalism. Many of these former regions of the Soviet Union, now independent countries, are struggling to establish democratic processes for their populations. They view the spread of Taliban Islamic fundamentalism as a challenge to their move toward popular sovereignty.

On the other hand, since there are minorities from these countries, particularly Uzbeks and Tajiks, living in Afghanistan, the governments of these neighboring countries have to be careful about the amount and intensity of their anti-Taliban support.

---

# Islam: Basic Ideas

---

## Introduction

You have probably heard the name *Islam* associated with Afghanistan. Most people in Afghanistan and in surrounding countries believe in Islam. The Taliban and Osama bin Laden believe in a radical form of Islam. In this section, you will learn about Islam, its main ideas, customs, and practices. (<http://thetruereligion.org/intro.htm> - - a short introduction to Islam)

---

## Definition of Islam

Islam means submission to the will of God in the Arabic language. The word *Islam* has the same root as the Arabic word *salaam*, which means peace. Muslims around the world often greet each other with the phrase “Salaam” in much the same manner as Jews say, “Shalom,” as a greeting. Both salaam and shalom come from the same common language root, the three-letter root - *s-l-m*. (<http://media.isnet.org/off/Islam/basics/index.html>) – discussion of various “doctrinal” aspects of Islam by noted theologians.

---

## Allah

Islam is not named after a person like Christianity, which was named after Jesus Christ, Buddhism after Buddha, and Confucianism after Confucius. The central focus of Islam is always God.

The basic tenet of Islam is that you must submit to Allah (the Arabic word for God) and live according to His divinely inspired law.

---

## The Precept

- The key truth that Allah has revealed to mankind is that the only divine and worshipful “being” is Allah, the almighty God; thus all human beings should submit to and worship Allah.
- Allah has 99 names, among them, The Gracious, The Merciful, The Beneficent, The Creator, The All-Knowing, The All-Wise, The Lord of the Universe, The First, The Last, and others.

No matter what “sect” of Islam a person belongs to, he believes in this important religious belief that is the common thread of Islam.

---



# Arabs and Islam

---

## Muslims (Moslems)

Now that you know that the religion is called Islam and the name of the God of Islam is Allah, what does the word *Muslim* mean? The word has the same s-l-m root as the words *Islam* and *salaam*. A Muslim is a person who submits to the will of Allah, regardless of race, nationality, or ethnic background. A Muslim has to submit completely and obediently to Allah and live according to Allah's message.

- Muslims worship Allah alone and must not worship any person, place or thing other than Allah. They believe that Allah is the God for the Christians, the Jews, the Muslims, the Buddhists, the Hindus, and even atheists.
- Orally repeating the basic belief of a Muslim found in the "motto" of Islam: "Laa Elaaha illallaah" which means, "There is no god but Allah." is the way a Muslim professes that he belongs to Islam.

---

## Importance of Arabic in Islam

The "motto" above, "Laa Elaaha illallaah," is in Arabic. Even though the people of Afghanistan speak a number of different non-Arabic languages, the language of Islam is Arabic. (Historically, Islam began among the Arabs of what is now Saudi Arabia.) The prayers, sayings, and many blessings of Islam are all spoken in Arabic, just as the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an (Koran) is written in Arabic. This common religious language of Islam is one of the ties that bind all Muslims together.

---

## Arabs and Non- Arab Muslims

Because of the importance of the Arabic language in Islam, many people assume that most Muslims are Arabs. This is not the case: About 80% of all Muslims are **not** Arabs. In fact there are more Muslims in Indonesia than in the Arab Middle East. Besides Indonesia, Muslims make up the majority in such non-Arabic countries as Turkey, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and other central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union. There is a large minority in China too.

In Europe, Albania is Muslim. Bulgaria, Bosnia, and Macedonia have large Muslim populations. Elsewhere in Europe, there are immigrant communities of Muslims from Africa, Turkey, and Asia in France, Britain, and Germany. In the Americas Muslims have increased in recent years, both from conversions and immigration; 20% of the population of Suriname in South America is Muslim. Today there are about five million Muslims in America.

---

# Muhammad (Mohammed)

---

## Importance

*Muhammad is ... the Messenger of God  
and the last of the prophets ... (Qur'an, 33:40)*

This one phrase from the Qur'an shows Muhammad's place in Islam and in world religion. Muslims believe that Muhammad is the prophet of Islam. His message is Islam. The revelation of Islam that Muhammad received is the Qur'an (Koran).

---

## Muhammad and Other Religions

In terms of other world religions, Muhammad is the last prophet of God to mankind. He is the last messenger of God. His message applies to all mankind, regardless of their beliefs. Muhammad is the successor to Moses, Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, and Jesus.

Muhammad is **the** prophet among all previous prophets and messengers. He reinterpreted and corrected the message of Allah and gave mankind the true word from Allah. In a sense, he "cleansed" the message. In spite of his importance in Islam and for the world, Muslims do not worship him or ascribe any divine qualities to the prophet.

---

## Muhammad, His Calling

Muhammad was born in Mecca (Makkah) in what is now Saudi Arabia, in the year 570 CE. His father died before he was born. Soon after his birth, his mother also died, so Muhammad was raised by his uncle.

Because of his trustworthiness and sincerity he was often asked to arbitrate disputes. He has been described as calm and meditative. Muhammad was very religious. It was his habit to meditate in a cave near Mecca.

At the age of 40, during one of his retreats, Muhammad received his first revelation from Allah through the Angel Gabriel. This revelation, which he continued to receive for twenty-three years, is known as the Qur'an (Koran).

---

*Continued on next page*

## Muhammad (Mohammed), Continued

---

### **Spreading Islam**

As Muhammad began to preach the truth that Allah had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered persecution. This became so strong that in the year 622 CE Muhammad and his followers emigrated from Mecca. This event, called the Hijra ('migration'), when they traveled about 260 miles to the north to the city of Medina, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

After several years, Muhammad and his followers returned to Mecca, where they made peace with their enemies and established Islam. Before Muhammad died at the age of 63, most of Arabia was Muslim, and within a century of his death, Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China.

---

# Five Pillars of Islam

---

<b>Introduction</b>	The five tenets are the foundation for all Islamic belief. They are the cornerstones of Islam. ( <a href="http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/pillars/">http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/pillars/</a> – an introduction to the five pillars.)
---------------------	--

---

<b>Commitment</b>	Called the Ash-Shahaadah, this is the “credo” of Islam: “I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.” All Muslims subscribe to and repeat this belief.
-------------------	--

---

<b>Prayer</b>	Called As-Salaat in Arabic, this is the requirement that adult Muslims pray at five specific times during a twenty-four hour day to Allah.
---------------	--

- This is a ritual prayer requiring Muslims to say specific prayers and to coordinate hand and arm movements, eventually culminating in complete prostration or bowing down with the hands on the floor to show complete submission to Allah.
  - While performing As-Salaat, Muslims face in the direction of Mecca.
- 

<b>Alms</b>	Known as the Az-Zakaat in Arabic, this means that Muslims must contribute to the support of those less fortunate Muslims--support of the poor. Muslims are encouraged to pay their Zakaat during the holy month of Ramadan.
-------------	---

---

<b>Fasting</b>	In Arabic this is called As-Sawam. It means that during the month of Ramadan, adult Muslims who are in good health <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cannot eat, drink, or smoke from sunrise until sunset every day of this holy month.</li><li>• Must abstain from sexual relations.</li></ul>
----------------	--

The intention of fasting is to worship Allah. Ramadan is a sacred month because it commemorates the time when Allah first revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad. The time for Ramadan changes each year because it is based on a lunar calendar. Ramadan comes 11 days earlier each year.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Five Pillars of Islam, Continued

---

### **Pilgrimage**

Called Al- Hajj (Hadsh), this pilgrimage requires a Muslim in good health to travel to Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once in a lifetime. Specific preparation is necessary for the Hajj; for example there are rules about shaving and cutting hair and what to wear. One of the high points of the Hajj is the umrah, which means performing a ritual walk seven times around the sacred stone of Islam called the Kab'ah.

The Hajj commemorates the sacrifices and faith of Abraham, his second wife, Hagar, and their son, Ishmael. According to the Council on Islamic Education, it is the largest, regularly scheduled international gathering on Earth.

---

# Al Qur'an (Koran) and Sunnah

---

## Definition

- Al Qur'an (the Qur'an) is the revealed word of Islam, the holy book of the Muslims. Muhammad received the message in bits and pieces from the Angel Gabriel during a period of 23 years. The word *Al Qur'an* means the recitation. During Muhammad's lifetime it was recited publicly. The original language of the Qur'an is Arabic.
  - It is important to remember that Muslims believe the Qur'an is **the** word of Allah, untouched and uninterpreted by human beings. As Allah's final message to mankind, it is the holy book that supercedes all others: the *Old Testament*, the *Gospels*, etc.
- 

## Form and Content

The Qur'an is a collection of surahs or chapters, many of which you might call verses. Muhammad received the surahs from Allah. Scribes selected by Muhammad usually wrote down these verses. Sometimes they wrote on wood, trees, parchment, and even stones. Many followers also memorized the Qur'an by heart. In later years, the Qur'an was recopied and refined; accents and markings for reading were added.

---

## Interpretation

- The Sunnah is the spoken word and acts of Muhammad. The Sunnah, Muhammad's actual words and deeds, uses the life of Muhammad to explain and expand on the verses and teachings of the Qur'an so that Islam can eventually become a world religion.
- A second form of interpretation is called hadith. This is narration about the life of the prophet or what he approved - as opposed to his life itself, which is the Sunnah.

The Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the ahadith (plural of hadith) are the basic body of Islamic religious doctrine for all Muslims. (<http://www.afghan-network.net/Islam/> ) (<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/>)

---

## Jihad (Djihad)

---

<b>Definition</b>	<p>The word <i>jihad</i> means struggle in Arabic. This means a struggle between the forces of Allah (good) and the forces of evil --an eternal struggle.</p> <p>You have probably heard the word <i>jihad</i> in reference to Osama bin Laden and the Taliban. They consider the terrorism that they perpetuate a jihad. Actually, the word <i>jihad</i> has a couple of interpretations.</p>
<b>Self-defense</b>	<p>Islam allows fighting in self-defense and in defense of religion. There are rules of combat including prohibitions against harming civilians and against destroying crops, trees and livestock.</p> <p>If good Muslims do not risk their lives in the cause of Islam, injustice would triumph. The Qur'an says: "Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. God does not love transgressors." (2.190). War is the last resort and is subject to the precepts of Islamic sacred law.</p>
<b>Inner Struggle</b>	<p>The second and more personal meaning of jihad is an inner struggle. Each of us, according to Islam, is constantly fighting a "war" against self-centered desire, and egotism, with the final goal of attaining inner peace.</p>

---

## Islamic Schools (Sects)

---

### Religious vice Secular Law: Western View

The United States and most other Western countries make a clear distinction between the rule of law and religion. Religion is a separate personal issue that does **not** determine law. A legal case may make use of religion, but religion is not the determining factor in most legal cases. Simply put, a religious denomination, such as Methodism, Catholicism, or Judaism, doesn't have the power to rule on a case of adultery in a civil court or on a case of fraud in a criminal court. The United States has a secular system of law; religion plays no direct part in such a system.

---

### Islamic View

If you look at Islam, the perspective is different. Islamic law consists of guidelines and rules that determine all aspects of a Muslim's life from how to perform ritual prayer to conducting business transactions. It also includes crimes and the appropriate punishments for each.

- These Islamic laws are based primarily on the Qur'an and are called the Sharia.
  - Muslims must apply these precepts handed down to Muhammad in the sixth century to present-day situations.
- 

### Interpretation and Re- interpretation

This kind of religious legal system, particularly how to interpret the Qur'an and the ahadith, has resulted in a certain degree of divisiveness in Islam, just as varied interpretations of Christian doctrine have caused Christianity to split into various denominations. The two main sects of Islam, which are the schools of Islam, are the

- Sunni
  - Shi'ites (Shi'ia)
- 

### Shi'tes (Shi'ia)

The basic divisiveness in Islam is based on an historical incident. After Muhammad died, there was confusion about who should succeed him as the leader of Islam. One group felt that the successor was Imam Ali who had been appointed by Muhammad according to Allah's decree. Ali was a relative of Muhammad and the first to accept Islam. This group, mostly from the household of the prophet, was a minority and became known as the Shi'ites. They also believe that the leader of Islam must be endowed with grace and benevolence and should be infallible.

---

*Continued on next page*



## Islamic Schools (Sects), Continued

---

### Sunnis

The majority group, called Sunni Muslims, believe that Muhammad did not choose a specific successor and probably assumed that after his death, Muslims would find their own leader. Sunnis further believe that the prophet did not tell his followers how they ought to select their leaders or what qualifications their leaders should have.

The Sunnis chose a leader, later called the caliph, from outside Muhammad's household. The Shi'ites refused to accept the Sunnis' choice and split off from the main group.

---

### Results of the Division

Because of this succession split, variations in Islamic doctrine, law, and practice have developed between these two main groups over the centuries.

- Sunni Muslims predominate in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, and Indonesia.
- Shi'ites are the majority in Iran and southern Iraq.

Sunnis make up about 83 percent of Muslims, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*; Shi'ites, about 16 percent; and a few other small groups, the remainder.

---

# Osama (Usama) bin Laden and Islam

---

## **Bin Laden's Religious Background**

Bin Laden's brand of Islam is based on extremely conservative Islam called Wahhabism, which was espoused by Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab (1703-87). He was the founder of the sect and the co-founder of Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabis and the royal Saud family have long intermarried. The Saudis have adopted many of the conservative precepts of Wahhabism.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/07/international/middleeast/07SAUD.html>

---

## **Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia**

Wahhabi Islam is a total religious system. It has an answer for every question about a Muslim's life including social, legal and spiritual aspects. Wahhabi Islam is ascetic. Men should wear short robes and even avoid the black cords used on turbans and headgear. Mosques should have no decoration. Drinking alcohol is forbidden.

Punishment is based exclusively on the Qur'an, for example the right hand should be amputated for theft. Adulterers should be stoned to death. Murder and sexual deviation are punishable by beheading. To this day Saudi Arabia uses these punishments, especially beheading for capital crimes.

---

## **Bin Laden and the Taliban**

The kind of radically, conservative state that the Taliban have developed in Afghanistan has roots in Wahhabism, which inspires and feeds on the Taliban's fundamentalist religiosity. For fundamentalists, the Taliban have created what approaches a pure, ideal society based on Islamic law. This society fits bin Laden's mold too.

---

## **Focus on Expansion and Terrorism**

While bin Laden follows the conservative Wahhabi tenets, what he most fervently supports is that his brand of Islamic faith must expand. (To support this kind of expansion, Saudi Arabia supported the Afghan *mujahidin* when they were fighting the Communists. So did Osama bin Laden.)  
[http://www.newyorker.com/FROM\\_THE\\_ARCHIVE/ARCHIVES/?010924fr\\_archive03](http://www.newyorker.com/FROM_THE_ARCHIVE/ARCHIVES/?010924fr_archive03) – good article on bin Laden, his life and religion

Now bin Laden regards the struggle as a war between two civilizations: His Islam and the non-Muslim civilization, specifically the United States. Toward winning this struggle, bin Laden has committed his forces to terrorism.

<http://www.brookings.org/fp/projects/terrorism/faqs.htm#qb4> – an excellent set of informative questions about terrorism.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Osama (Usama) bin Laden and Islam, Continued

---

### Al Qaida

*Al Qaida* is the name of the network of Islamic extremists that bin Laden has at his command to carry out his radical Islamic terrorism.

- It consists of a group of about 3,000 commanders. Troops of Afghanis and Pakistanis number 100,000+.
- There are about 12 terrorist centers, with numerous cells, in North America, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Albania, Kosovo, Algeria, Chechenya, all the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, the Philippines, Egypt, Ethiopia and Somalia.

---

### Bin Laden's "Army"

Al Qaida is bin Laden's personal "army." Bin Laden could probably rally an army of over 200,000 men around the world, excluding those currently "in service" in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- Many members of his overseas forces are ready for both sustained and one-time operations.
- In the interim, the members of these terrorist forces return to normal "civilian" life in host countries. They are also available for terrorist operations on their own countries. (See appendix B for short articles from the U. S. State Department on Al Qaida.)

---

### Bin Laden and Saudi Arabia

Even though the country where he grew up, Saudi Arabia, is extremely conservative, bin Laden finds that it is not conservative enough. He thinks the following reasons, which are contrary to his purist concept of Islam, are grounds for overthrowing the Saudi royal family:

- Alliance of the ruling Saudi family with the West
  - Saudi Arabia's dependence on American and other foreign troops who came to the country to defend it during the Gulf War
  - Corruption of the Saudi regime
-

## Appendix A: Omar, Leader of the Taliban

---

### Article

*The reclusive ruler who runs the Taliban*

By Robert Marquand | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor Oct 10, 2001

PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN - A Pakistani official arrived in Kandahar, Afghanistan, this spring, on a mission to save two towering 1,700-year-old mountain carvings of Buddha. He tried to dissuade the Taliban Supreme Leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, from blowing up the statues. Mullah Omar replied by describing a dream he'd had about "a mountain falling down on him." Before it hit him, Allah appeared, asking Omar why he did nothing to get rid of the false idols. "I closed my attaché case," the Pakistani recalls, shoulders sagging. "There was nothing left to say."

Such private visions are part of the decision making process that has guided the life of the man who rose from village mullah to Taliban leader to partner of Osama bin Laden.

Those who have met Omar, say he's tall (6 foot, 6 inches) bearded, reclusive, and a lover of war stories. A fierce commander, he was wounded four times in the jihad against the Soviets, leaving him with one eye.

His title, "Commander of the Faithful," has not been adopted by any Muslim anywhere for nearly 1000 years. Omar has given few interviews, rarely meets with non-Muslims, and there is only one known photo of him - as a young man. Diplomats describe him as shy and untalkative with foreigners. Omar says he has one son.

"He has never visited Kabul, the capital," says Rahimullah Yousefzai, who has interviewed Omar twice for The News, a Karachi, Pakistan, based newspaper. "He is not a great speaker. To his followers, his strength is his piety, the force of his belief."

In the past year, facing drought, military problems, a lack of international recognition, and sanctions, Omar has become increasingly isolated, and influenced by Arabs such as Ayman Zawahiri, Osama Bin Laden's No. 2. Omar's rhetoric used to focus on rebuilding Afghanistan, and even on censuring Mr. bin Ladin. During the past year, his public statements have taken on a pan-Islamic tone found more among militant Islamists from Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Omar used to be seen cross-legged in local mosques talking with his followers. But in recent months (until this week's air raids), he was seen in convoys of Landcruisers with tinted windows, a gift of wealthy Arabs. Omar's house (reportedly hit by bombs yesterday) was one of 16 large residences built with Arab money along a stretch of Herat St. in Kandahar. Mr. Zawahiri is a neighbor.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Appendix A: Omar, Leader of the Taliban, Continued

---

### Article, continued

Born in 1959 as the son of a peasant farmer, he grew up in mud huts around the village of Singesar, near Kandahar. In short, he's an unlikely leader in a country where pedigree and royalty have always been the path to power. Omar, in fact, was relatively unknown in Afghanistan until 1994. He came to power reluctantly, says Mr. Yousefzai. Omar told him that he started the Taliban after a dream in which Allah came to him in the shape of a man, asking him to lead the faithful. There were also practical reasons. Omar, known for a pure devotion to Islam, was a mullah with a village madrassah near Kandahar. But he was "horrified," says Yousefzai, by the behavior of former mujahideen commanders that he had fought alongside from 1989 to 1992. They were kidnapping and raping boys and girls, stealing from Afghans at gunpoint on the road, and driving international aid workers out of Kandahar. So, Omar and 30 ethnic Pashtun followers "picked up the gun" - at first to stop four notorious mujahideen who were raping women near Omar's village - and later to bring law and order to an entire country. The idea: create a Muslim state that would perfectly practice a strict interpretation of the Koran, one taught in the fundamentalist madrassahs of Pakistan, where Omar went to school. The Taliban movement, backed by the Pakistani secret service, succeeded beyond anyone's imagination - capturing most of the country by 1998. In 1996, as Taliban fervor increased, Omar accepted the title of "Amirul Momineen," or "commander of the faithful," in an emotional meeting in Kandahar where he appeared on a balcony above thousands of cheering Taliban, wrapping himself in a cloak said to belong to the Prophet Mohammad. The cloak had not been removed from its Kandahar shrine in 60 years, and had never been worn before. Omar is the first Muslim since the Fourth Caliph, a nephew of Prophet Mohammad, to publicly accept the Amirul title, a ranking in Islam nearly second to the Prophet. Omar's weighty title, which is not accepted by Muslims outside Afghanistan, represents a long journey for a man who never finished his Islamic education. In fact, Omar laments his interrupted schooling, and still calls himself a "talib," (one who seeks), rather than a "mullah" (one who gives) - even while some of his followers think of him as a god. Many ordinary ethnic Pashtun followers see him as a repository of piety. "It is our duty to follow Omar, he is our father, the first man to take the cloak of the prophet," says Qoari Ali Khan, the head of a madrassah in Pabbi, Pakistan, who was one of 250 mujahideen commanded by Omar in the anti-Soviet war, where the Taliban chief made a name for himself as a marksman with anti-tank rockets.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Appendix A: Omar, Leader of the Taliban, Continued

---

### Article, continued

Still, in the past year, some of the shine has come off the mantle of the current Amirul Momineen of Afghanistan. Some young Pashtuns who used to support Omar, and his dream of a pure Islamic state, are disillusioned. Omar has never traveled to Kabul to set up a functioning government. Decisions are made in private with a small council of elders. Funds are often distributed among the Taliban by special envoys who travel to Kandahar for an audience with Omar. A plea is made, and Omar opens a large tin box, kept near his bed, which is filled with US dollars.

Some Afghans now speak of Omar's past year as something of an evolving tragedy, as he continues to be buffeted between Arab, Pakistani, and other influences. Some Muslims sympathetic to the Taliban do not want to see Afghanistan used as a platform for bin Laden's violent pan-Islamic jihad.

"There is no question that at the top levels, the Arabs have grown strong in the past two years," says a young Pakistani journalist who has visited Kandahar recently. "People like Osama and Zawahiri don't have to actually see Omar to influence him. Their presence isn't needed. The circumstances and their moves make it possible."

In the Taliban ranks, there is some dissatisfaction - though US strikes may again bring a rallying to Omar. Still, as the country undergoes drought, farmers are reportedly tired of handing over their sons each year for a jihad to take the Panjshir Valley, held by the Northern Alliance. That's another reason Omar depends on Arab fighters on the front lines.

Moreover, in something of a risky move that did not yield Omar any of the international credit he expected, the Taliban did last year stop an entire harvest of poppy. Farmers growing poppy earn about \$5,000 a hectare, as compared with \$1200 a hectare for wheat.

Last year as well, a huge truck bomb exploded near Omar's headquarters, killing his brother, and reportedly sending the mullah into a period of troubled silence.

During this time, as well, wealthy Arabs who come to Afghanistan to cut their teeth as radical jihadis - have often been reported as "bossing around" and "treating badly" many of the local Taliban. "We used to see them once in awhile, and knew they lived in camps," says the Pakistani journalist. "But in the past year, they are seen on the streets, in the restaurants, everywhere. Omar seems unaware of this."

---

*Continued on next page*

## Appendix A: Omar, Leader of the Taliban, Continued

---

### Article, continued

In the late 1990s, Omar told Mr. Yousafzai that "I am ready to sacrifice everything in completing the unfinished agenda of our noble jihad...until there is no bloodshed in Afghanistan and Islam becomes a way of life for our people." Yet the country has lived in fear, with continued bloodshed. Again, in the late 1990s, Omar is on record condemning any export of jihad by the Taliban to neighboring countries, and especially by Osama bin Laden. "We have told Osama not to use Afghan soil to carry out political activities as it creates unnecessary confusion about Taliban objectives," Omar told Yousefzai.

Yet the Pakistani Minister of Interior Moinuddin Haider, who visited Omar last month to persuade him to turn over Osama bin Laden, says the man is isolated: "I told Mullah Omar, 'You have switched off your TV set,'" Mr. Haider told reporters here. "I said, 'You don't have many embassies ...to tell you what is happening. You don't know what the Muslim world is saying right now.'"

Some observers say that Omar, who never finished his Islamic schooling, has become swayed by Gulf Arabs who have Islamic credentials that, for a man with humble origins, must be dazzling.

The scholars and clerics from the schools of Egypt and the land of Saudi Arabia, the land of the prophet, and, in the mind of a fundamentalist, the place where a restoration of "true Islam" must spring from - give these figures great influence on Omar, experts say.

In a Voice of America interview on Sept. 21, Omar said: "God says he will never be satisfied with the infidels. In terms of worldly affairs, America is very strong. Even if it were twice as strong or twice that, it could not be strong enough to defeat us. We are confident that no one can harm us if God is with us."

"I want an independent state for Palestine too," says one local Muslim who has followed the Taliban closely. "But I don't want to put my gun on your shoulder, the way the Arabs are doing with Omar.

"The tragedy is that at the beginning, Omar sounds like the man who will pave the way for the king's [Zahir Shah's] return. He talked about peace and security. But he never said he would try to become the leader of the Muslim world.

But when he says, 'there is one authority, and that is me,' which he has said, influenced by I-don't-know-who, it becomes a farce."

Afghanistan's Mullah Mohammed Omar remains a mystery to his own people and the outside world seven years after his Taliban movement first shot to prominence. The tall, bearded, one-eyed cleric keeps to himself, living a reclusive life that borders on the paranoid.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Appendix A: Omar, Leader of the Taliban, Continued

---

**Article,  
continued**

He rarely ventures out of his southern Afghan stronghold of Kandahar, hardly ever meets foreigners and makes no public speeches or appearances--the Taliban has banned television and photographs, so few people know what he looks like. "Omar is such an enigma that at first many Afghans thought he did not exist and was a figment of the imagination of Pakistan who backed the Taliban," says an Afghan tribal leader. He was born into a family of landless peasants in a village near Kandahar in 1959 and, after studying at a religious school, became a mullah in the village mosque of Singesar. Omar fought with the mujahideen guerrillas against Soviet occupying forces in the late 1980s. He and other former mujahideen soon became disillusioned with the rampant warlordism, crime and mayhem that followed the departure of the Soviet troops in 1989, and in 1994 helped form the Taliban, literally Islamic students, who pledged to impose law and order and create a pure Islamic society. "We chose Mullah Omar to lead us, not for his political or military ability but for his piety and his unswerving belief in Islam," says his close colleague, Kandahar Governor Mullah Mohammed Hassan. Osama bin Laden introduced Omar to the wider world of Islamic radicalism, global jihad and hatred of the non-Muslim world. Bin Laden also provided funds and recruited thousands of Arabs to fight in the Taliban army.

Far Eastern Review, October 4, 2001

---



## Appendix B: History of Terrorist Activity

---



### Timeline

#### The Activities of the Al Qaida

The Al Qaida has a long history of terrorist activity, which dates back to the early 1990s. Many of their earlier operations failed to achieve the desired effect; however, experience has enabled the organization to develop a more sophisticated approach.

- Suspected in September 11 plot to hijack planes and destroy the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and other unspecified targets (2001)
- Plotted an unsuccessful effort to attack U.S. and Israel tourists during millennial celebrations (2000)
- Implicated in bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania that killed over 300 (1998)
- Accused by the U.S. of bomb attacks on American military personnel in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia (1996)
- Linked to unsuccessful plot to assassinate President Clinton in the Philippines (1995)
- Linked to unsuccessful plot to bomb multiple U.S. trans-Pacific flights (1995)
- Linked to unsuccessful plot to bomb U.S. and Israeli embassies in Manila (1994)
- Linked to unsuccessful plot to assassinate Pope John Paul II in Manila (1994)
- Claims to have downed U.S. helicopters and killed U.S. servicemen in Somalia (1993)
- Attempted bombing of U.S. troops in Aden, Yemen (1992)

Source: U.S. State Department

---

## Appendix C: International Associations

---

### Top Commanders

Al Qaeda is an international association of allied groups operating in many parts of the world. Its top commanders are

- AYMAN AL ZAWAHRI, head of the Egyptian Jihad Islami, who is Bin Laden's senior deputy and heir apparent
- JUMMA MAMANGANI, an Uzbek, who was recently appointed Al Qaeda chief of operations. He is former commander of the Moslem Army for the Liberation of Kyrgistan. Three key Afghan training camps, at Jalalabad, Farmada and Daronta, are under his command.
- FATEH KAMEL, who leads the most militant cells of the extremist Algerian GIA. In the name of Al Qaida, he controls terrorist cells in the United States, Canada and Algeria.
- MUHAMMED ATIF aka SUBHI ABU-SITTAH, who is nominal chief of staff of the network and its brightest military brain. He comes from the Egyptian Jihad Islami
- IMAD MUGHNIYEH, the former Lebanese Hizballah hostage-taker and bomber, who is in charge of the combined terrorist campaign around the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, Europe and Israel.

---

### Throughout the World

On top of the 3,500 hard core commanders and 110,000 Afghan and Pakistani troops, Al Qaeda retains another 6400 commanders in 12 centers: North America, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Albania, Kosovo, Algeria, Chechenya, Tadjikistan and all the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, the Philippines, Egypt, Ethiopia and Somalia.

The numbers Bin Laden can muster differs from place to place. In North America, together with his closest ally, the Egyptian Jihad Islami, some 2,500 hard core fighting men; in Yemen, where his family originated before migrating to Saudi Arabia – 2000 directly. But Bin Laden has a special relationship with the commanders of the 20,000-man strong irregular “Moslem Liberation Army, which hold a monopoly of the arms trade of the Arabian Peninsula, the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea and East Africa. Its reach sometimes goes as far as Iran.

Bin Laden often serves as the MLA's clearing bank and ready bankroll for arms deal.

---

*Continued on next page*

## Appendix C: International Associations, Continued

---

### **Saudi Arabia**

In Saudi Arabia, where the privileged and affluent Bin Laden clan lives, Osama commands some 200-250 hard-core commanders, but many more potential partisans among the disaffected tribes in the central and eastern provinces, especially the Nejd, as well as in the Saudi armed forces and national guard.

An intensive Al Qaeda recruitment effort in those two Saudi forces could cause their collapse and drop in Bin Laden's lap their arsenals, with some of the most sophisticated hardware in use today.

---

### **Overseas Legions**

According to conservative estimates, the millionaire-terrorist could most probably rally around the world roughly the same number of fighting men as those flocking to his flag in Afghanistan and Pakistan, namely an army of over 200,000 men. Many members of his overseas legions are available for both sustained and for one-time operations. In between, they simply go back to their normal pursuits and their homes in host countries. They are also available for terrorist operations on their home ground.

---

## Appendix D: Other References

---

### Resources

Besides the websites and URLs cited in the body of this handbook, the following resources will help you better understand Afghani culture and people:

- *Encyclopedia of World Cultures* (particularly volume III), edited by Paul Hockings. Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1992. Excellent summaries of the different tribal and ethnic groups of Afghanistan and neighboring countries.
- *The Europa World Year Book 2001* (volume I). London: Europa Publications, 2001. An excellent indepth survey of Afghanistan.
- Marsden, Peter. *The Taliban: War, religion and the new order in Afghanistan*. New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1999. Indepth study of the Taliban including their origins and type of leadership, their religious “creed,” implementation of religious beliefs, etc.
- O’Balance, Edgar. *Afghan Wars 1839-1992: What Britain Gave Up and the Soviet Union Lost*. New York, Brassey’s, 1993. Good account of the major conflicts in Afghanistan over the years: the Anglo Wars, the Soviet period, and civil wars.
- Rubin, Barnett R. *The Fragmentations of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*
- Rubin, Barnett R. *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Both the above volumes by Rubin should be read together to get a complete, well-analyzed picture of the politics of Afghanistan’s becoming an international “member” of nation states, strongly influenced by the power-brokering nations of the world and how this affected the country itself causing its disintegration.

---